

Message Text

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TAGS: PINT PFOR MP US
SUBJECT(FOREIGN MINISTER WALTER REQUESTS FINANCIAL HELP
FOR LABOR PARTY IN ELECTORAL CAMPAIGN

1. I CALLED ON FOREIGN MINISTER, SIR HAROLD WALTER, ON NOVEMBER 16 TO DISCUSS THE PROBLEM OF AMBASSADOR RAMPHUL (SEE PORT LOUIS 1015 EXDIS). WALTER HAD JUST BROKEN UP A LONG MEETING WITH FINANCE MINISTER RINGADOO AND ATTORNEY GENERAL GHURBURRUN (THE THREE OF THEM LEAD THE SO-CALLED "LEFT WING" OF THE LABOR PARTY). BEFORE I COULD BEGIN, WALTER SAID HE WANTED TO RAISE SOMETHING HIMSELF. "YOU HAVE TO HELP US," HE SAID. "WE ARE FIGHTING FOR OUR LIVES IN THIS ELECTION AND WITHOUT HELP WE WON'T MAKE IT." I EXPRESSED SOME SKEPTICISM THAT THE LABOR PARTY NEEDED ANY HELP, WHEREUPON SIR HAROLD MADE CLEAR THAT WHAT HE HAD IN MIND WAS FINANCIAL HELP. "YOU KNOW WE ARE VERY POOR," HE SAID. "WE DON'T HAVE THE RESOURCES."

2. WHEN I DIDN'T PICK THAT UP WALTER SAID, "IF YOU WANT TO HAVE A TASTE OF THE MMM... YOU'LL REGRET IT. IF YOU WANT TO SEE THE RUSSIANS FIRMLY ENTRENCHED HERE... THAT'S THE ALTERNATIVE." HE THEN CITED A RECENT PURCHASE OF 6000 TWO-DOLLAR T-SHIRTS BY THE MMM IN THE PARTY COLOR (MAUVE) WITH THE THREE HEARTS (THE PARTY SYMBOL) AND THE SLOGAN "LE MMM VAINCRA". SINCE IN THIS SOCIETY PARTY T-SHIRTS

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TAKE THE PLACE OF BUMPER-STICKERS THIS WAS SUPPOSED TO

IMPRESS ME WITH THE FINANCIAL RESOURCES OF THE MMM. WALTER SAID HE AND HIS PARTY ASSOCIATES HAD RECENTLY DISCOVERED A MEANS BY WHICH THE SOVIETS HAVE BEEN CREATING AN ELECTORAL FUND FOR THE MMM: MAURITIANS WHO WISH THEIR CHILDREN TO STUDY IN THE SOVIET UNION HAVE TO APPROACH BADRY (MEMBER OF ASSEMBLY, LABOR LEADER, CLOSE POLITICAL ASSOCIATE OF RAMGOOLAM, AND HEAD OF THE MAURITIUS-USSR FRIENDSHIP SOCIETY), WHO TAKES 6,000 RUPEES FROM THE PERSON, KEEPS 3000 AND GIVES 3000 TO THE SOVIETS, WHO IN TURN GIVE IT TO THE MMM. WALTER SAID HE AND RINGADOO HAD JUST DECIDED THEY WOULD PUT A STOP TO THIS BY ESTABLISHING A COMMITTEE BY WHICH ALL FOREIGN SCHOLARSHIPS WOULD HAVE TO BE APPROVED. HE SAID HE PLANNED TO "EXPOSE" BADRY (WHO IS PLANNING TO RUN ON THE LABOR PARTY TICKET IN WALTER'S DISTRICT) AND TO ATTACK THE SOVIETS AS WELL.

3. I EVENTUALLY GOT WALTER ONTO THE SUBJECT OF RAMPHUL, BUT EVEN THEN HE SAID IN JEST AT ONE POINT THAT PERHAPS WE REFUSED TO HELP THE LABOR PARTY BECAUSE WE KNEW THAT IF IT LOST THE ELECTIONS RAMPHUL WOULD BE REPLACED. WALTER'S REQUEST MAY SOUND FRIVOLOUS BUT IT WAS MEANT SERIOUSLY. IT SEEMS TO ME ANOTHER BIT OF EVIDENCE THAT THE LABOR PARTY IS RUNNING SCARED, IN FACT VERY SCARED. I HAVE BEEN HERE LESS THAN FIVE MONTHS AND DO NOT FEEL CONFIDENT THAT I HAVE A THOROUGH GRASP OF THE POLITICAL SITUATION (A VERY COMPLEX ONE, WITH 31 PARTIES REGISTERED, DEEP-SEATED ETHNIC RIVALRIES, NINE YEARS HAVING PASSED WITHOUT ELECTIONS, AND ABOUT 40 PERCENT OF THE POPULATION BETWEEN THE AGES OF 18 AND 30 VOTING FOR THE FIRST TIME). BUT A FEW TENTATIVE COMMENTS ARE IN ORDER.

4. COMMENTS:

(A) I AM INCREASINGLY CONVINCED THAT THE MMM (MAURITIAN MILITANT MOVEMENT) POSES A SERIOUS DANGER TO THE STABILITY OF MAURITIUS AND TO THE COUNTRY'S ORIENTATION OF "NEUTRAL-BUT-LOOKING-TOWARD-THE-WEST". THIS PARTY IS PROFOUNDLY MARXIST IN PHILOSOPHY AND OPERATING METHODS, I BELIEVE IT IS MUCH MORE PRO-SOVIET THAN IT NOW ADMITS (IN ORDER NOT TO LOSE VOTES), AND IF IT CAME TO POWER THERE COULD BE THESE

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EARLY CONSEQUENCES: WIDESPREAD NATIONALIZATIONS, MASS FLIGHT OF CAPITAL AND EXODUS OF THOSE MIDDLE CLASS PEOPLE WHO HAVE SOMEWHERE TO GO, RESULTING IN SEVERE ECONOMIC DISLOCATIONS, A RE-ORIENTATION OF MAURITIUS' FOREIGN POLICY IN THE DIRECTION OF THE SOVIETS; THE GRADUAL ABOLISHMENT OF THE COUNTRY'S DEMOCRATIC SYSTEM AND INSTITUTIONS IN ORDER TO ENTRENCH THE MMM IN POWER FOR GOOD.

(B) MOST OBJECTIVE OBSERVERS BELIEVE THE MMM WILL DO VERY WELL IN THE FORTHCOMING ELECTIONS. SOME PEOPLE THINK THEY WILL IWN. THERE IS AMAZINGLY LITTLE CONSENSUS, BUT THE PREDICTION THAT IS THE MOST COMPELLING--PERHAPS ONLY BECAUSE OF ITS SYMMETRY-- IS THAT THE MMM, THE PMSD (MAURITIAN SOCIAL DEMOCRATIC PARTY) AND THE LABOR PARTY-MUSLIM COALITION WILL EACH RECEIVE ABOUT 30 PERCENT OF THE VOTES, WITH THE REMAINING 10 PERCENT GOING TO THE SMALLER PARTIES. SUCH A RESULT WOULD REQUIRE A COALITION FOR ANYONE TO BE ABLE TO GOVERN. THE MMM IS AN ANATHEMA TO THE PMSD, BUT THE PMSD WOULD PROBABLY WILLINGLY RESTORE THE COALITION WITH LABOR THAT EXISTED FROM 1969 TO 1973 AND THE COUNTRY WOULD BE WELL GOVERNED. IF IT WERE UP TO THE MMM TO CHOOSE A COALITION PARTNER IT WOULD MUCH PREFER LABOR. AS FOR LABOR, IF IT WERE IN A POSITION TO DO THE CHOOSING THERE WOULD BE FACTIONS PULLING IT BOTH WAYS, ONE TOWARD THE MMM AND ANOTHER TOWARD THE PMSD, WITH NO TELLING NOW WHICH FACTION WOULD BE STRONGER (THE TWO FACTIONS ARE RIGHT NOW STRUGGLING OVER WHICH WILL PRE-DOMINATE IN THE LABOR PARTY'S LIST OF CANDIDATES). A LABOR-MMM COALITION WOULD PULL THE COUNTRY LEFTWARD, THE EXTENT DEPENDING ON WHETHER THE MMM WAS A VERY JUNIOR PARTNER OR A NEAR-EQUAL.

(C) RULE BY THE LABOR PARTY-MUSLIM COALITION HAS NOT BEEN HARMFUL TO OUR INTERESTS AND ITS CONTINUANCE IN POWER WOULD BE TO OUR ADVANTAGE. BUT THERE IS NO QUESTION THAT ITS STRENGTH HAS DIMINISHED SINCE 1967, WHEN IT MAY ALSO HAVE BEEN ARTIFICALLY BOOSTED BY BEING ON THE "RIGHT" (WINNING) SIDE ON THE ISSUE OF INDEPENDENCE VS. CONTINUED ASSOCIATION WITH BRITAIN. LABOR IS HAVING A DIFFICULT TIME RESTORING ITS APPEAL TO THE ELECTORATE PARTICULARLY IN THE SENSE OF PRESENTING SOME NEW, YOUNGER, MORE DYNAMIC, LESS
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TAINTED CANDIDATES. WITH ONLY 51 CANDIDACIES TO OFFER, THERE IS NOT MUCH ROOM FOR NEW BLOOD, ESPECIALLY AS RAMGOOLAM FEELS REQUIRED TO RETAIN MANY OF THE OLD PARTY WAR-HORSES AND SOME OF THE "TURNCOATS" WHO JOINED THE LABOR AFTER BEING ELECTED AS MEMBERS OF OTHER PARTIES.

(D) LABOR IS PROBABLY SUFFERING FINANCIALLY. IT HAS A VERY WEAK PARTY STRUCTURE PARTLY BECAUSE IT HASN'T NEEDED ONE SINCE IT HAS BEEN IN POWER SO LONG. IT PROBABLY GETS SOME HELP FROM THE INDIAN GOVERNMENT, AND WEALTHY MAURITIANS DOUBTLESS COVER THEIR BETS BY CONTRIBUTING TO LABOR AS WELL AS TO THE PMSD WHICH THEY WOULD PREFER TO SEE IN CHARGE. WITHOUT BEING ABLE TO PROVE IT, I HAVE NO DOUBT THAT THE MMM RECEIVES SOVIET FINANCIAL SUPPORT. ITS NEWSPAPER, LE MILITANT, IS DAILY FILLED WITH BLATANTLY SOVIET PROPAGANDA

WHICH AT A MINIMUM KEEPS THE PAPER SOLVENT AS WELL AS
LARGELY UNREADABLE.

(E) AS IN ALL SUCH ELECTIONS, MONEY WILL MAKE A DIFFERENCE
BUT IT IS HARD TO TELL HOW MUCH. FOR A PARTY IN POWER
WITH A GREAT MANY ASSETS LABOR SEEMS TO BE UNCOMMONLY
APPREHENSIVE. MY IMPRESSION IS THAT MAURITIAN POLITICIANS
KEEP IN CLOSE TOUCH WITH THEIR CONSITUENTS (IT'S A VERY
SMALL ISLAND, AFTER ALL) EVEN WHILE NEGLECTING THEM SOMEWHAT,
SO THEY OUGHT TO KNOW THE VOTERS' MOOD. IF THEY ARE WORRIED,
IT IS PROBABLY WITH GOOD CAUSE. THE MMM HAS ALL ITS OPPONENTS
WORRIED, NOT BECAUSE THEY FEAR IT MIGHT DEFEAT THEM FOR SOME
SEATS, BUT BECAUSE IT MAY WIN SO MANY AS TO BECOME A MAJOR
NATIONAL POLITICAL FACTOR IN ITS FIRST REAL EFFORT AT THE
POLL. THERE IS ALSO THE SERIOUS APPREHENSION-- WHICH I
BELIEVE IS WELL-FOUNDED -- THAT IF THE MMM ACTUALLY WINS A
MAJORITY IT WILL BE THE BEGINNING OF THE END IN THE SENSE
THAT THESE MY BE MAURITIUS' LAST DEMOCRATIC ELECTIONS.

5. I AM NOT NOW RECOMMENDING ANY COURSE OF ACTION, BUT
MERELY SUBMITTING SOME THOUGHTS TO BE PONDERED BY THOSE
INTERESTED IN THE UNFOLDING ELECTORAL PICTURE HERE.
KEELEY

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